

SECTION II. A VISION FOR CONCORD

A. INTRODUCTION

A “master plan” is intended to chart a course for managing the growth, development, and change that is likely to occur in the community in the future. As any sailor can explain, “charting the course” means knowing what the ship’s destination is and then figuring out the best way to get it there taking into account the weather, the rocks, the tides, and the features of the vessel. But if there is no destination, any course will get there. The community’s “Vision” is in essence a statement of where the community is trying to go – not in a geographic sense but in terms of what the community wants to be and what is important to the residents. The “Implementation Strategy” then lays out the actions or the course for moving the community in that direction.

This Vision or understanding of where Concord is trying to go and what it wants to be as it grows and changes is a key element in the master planning process. This section lays out a broad vision for what Concord should be in the future. It identifies the elements of the community that need to be respected as Concord grows and changes. It looks at how change can be consistent with Concord’s values. The Vision is a statement of the community’s key values on one hand and its hopes for the future on the other.

This Vision for Concord is an evolutionary rather than revolutionary view. It is firmly grounded in past efforts of thinking about the future of Concord and, in large part, is a refinement of those prior efforts. These include the City’s 1993 master plan – the Year 2010 Master Plan – and Vision 20/20. The Vision also reflects the fact that most residents like Concord and think that it is a desirable place to live and work. Therefore, much of the Vision focuses on assuring that the positive elements of Concord are maintained and not compromised as the City continues to grow and change.

B. THE YEAR 2010 MASTER PLAN

The City’s current master plan, the Year 2010 Master Plan, was adopted in 1993 and parts of the plan were revised in 1996. The 1993 plan was rooted in the City’s 1987 Master Plan that had incorporated land use and open space plans that the City had done prior to that.

The Year 2010 Master Plan included the following key concepts:

- Encouraging economic and physical development in a way that maintains the character of Concord
- Maintaining a mix of uses
- Maintaining both urban and rural areas
- Providing a diversity of housing and neighborhoods
- Ensuring the vitality of downtown Concord and Penacook
- Providing parks and open spaces

A key element in the 1993 master plan was the recommendation to establish an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) as a way of managing growth and development in the City. The idea of the UGB was to encourage a compact development pattern and avoid sprawl. In the part of the City

within the identified growth boundary, the plan recommended higher density development with infilling within developed areas and existing neighborhoods. Future economic growth was focused on the area within the UGB with an emphasis on the downtowns including Penacook. In the area of the City outside the UGB, the 1993 plan recommended lower density development that would be consistent with the rural character of this part of the community.

The Year 2010 Master Plan included a strong focus on preserving and enhancing the existing neighborhoods and villages in Concord with a goal of improving the livability of these areas so they would remain desirable places to live. The plan also included a focus on preserving and protecting open space.

The concepts of the Year 2010 Master Plan continue to form the basis of the City's long-range planning and have been embodied in the community's land use regulations. Many of these ideas continue to be relevant to the City's future and serve as the foundation for the current master planning effort.

C. VISION 20/20

Continuing growth in southern New Hampshire during the 1990s resulted in increased traffic on I-93 and led to proposals to widen and upgrade this key artery. This proposal generated concerns about how the widening project would impact Concord and whether it would fuel significant growth similar to what had been occurring in Nashua and Manchester. Out of this concern emerged the Vision 20/20 process, an independent consortium of local interests including the City of Concord, to develop a plan for managing future growth in the community. The Vision 20/20 effort was funded by a combination of state and local government grants and significant private fund raising.

The Vision 20/20 process resulted in a Vision for the future of the City based upon the concept of a "City of Villages". The Vision, published in 2001, set forth five principles that should shape the future of the City:

- A vibrant, livable downtown
- Neighborhoods served by walkable villages
- Preservation and access to the natural environment
- Economic vitality
- Transportation that serves the community

Vision 20/20 focused on channeling economic growth to the downtown and existing village centers and what it called "the opportunity corridor" – essentially the area between I-93 and Main Street including areas both north and south of downtown. Vision 20/20 proposed creating three interdependent development zones along the opportunity corridor:

- A Class A office district to the north that would create a downtown employment center that would support retail and entertainment establishments in the corridor
- A business park to the south to provide job opportunities and maintain a diverse economy in the downtown
- A mixed-use Downtown district at the center that provides expanded commercial as well as residential opportunities at densities similar to the existing downtown

In terms of residential growth and development, Vision 20/20 focused on concentrating future growth in the downtown and village centers including Penacook, West Concord, the Heights, East Concord, and the South End. The plan also envisioned the possibility of creating one or more new villages as a way to accommodate growth in a manner appropriate to Concord's character. Vision 20/20 proposed connecting the villages to each other, to open space, and to downtown with trails, paths, and bicycle lanes.

A key element of Vision 20/20 was a proposal to create a redevelopment entity to achieve the vision for economic vitality. This entity would be the primary vehicle to implement certain aspects of the vision especially development of the North Opportunity Corridor.

While the Vision 20/20 process and organization was independent of the City of Concord, the City was an active participant in the process. In 2001, the City Council passed a resolution formally endorsing the five principles of the Vision 2020, and these principles have subsequently guided the preparation of this Master Plan.

D. THE CONCORD COMMUNITY SURVEY

As an initial step in the process of updating the Master Plan, the City conducted a random mail survey of a sample of Concord households in May of 2004. The City's consultant mailed a questionnaire to 3,220 households. A reminder was mailed to the same households a week later. A total of 1,043 usable surveys were returned and tabulated for a response rate of 32.4%.

The key conclusions of the community survey include:

- There is a relatively strong desire to adopt additional regulations regarding historic preservation including limitations on the demolition of historic structures and design standards for new development in historic areas
- There is a desire to preserve open/undeveloped space with over 2/3's favoring increased City funding for this purpose
- The major concerns of respondents were transportation related including issues with excessive speed/traffic volumes on neighborhood streets, traffic congestion on major streets, and congestion in getting to Concord Hospital
- Affordable housing is a concern but there is no clear preferred approach for dealing with it
- Taxes are also a concern
- There is a desire to control the rate of growth with a strong desire to grow more slowly than the rate suggested by the population projections included in the questionnaire

In summary, the community survey found that most people feel that Concord is a good place to live and that the "City has done well".

E. THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The Master Plan process included a series of special studies prepared by consultants, together with input from a number of citizen committees designated by the Planning Board to focus on specific components of the Plan, as well as workshops and hearings for the general public to provide commentary.

Consultants were retained in the areas of transportation, recreation, economic development, historic resources, wetland identification, urban design, and demographic analysis. To work with these consultants on related areas of the Master Plan, the Planning Board enlisted the assistance of the Conservation Commission, the Heritage Commission, the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee, and the Economic Development Advisory Committee. Special citizen advisory committees were appointed in the areas of transportation and housing, and the Planning Board itself focused on land use as well as the overall process and end product.

The use of a regional transportation model was shared with the NHDOT as part of an effort intended to coordinate the City's Master Plan with the State's planning process for the expansion of I-93 through Concord. However, differing needs for levels of specificity caused the City to refine the model with its own consultant assistance in order to obtain useful results at a cost to the City in terms of time and resources.

The Vision 2020 organization initially provided financial support for facilitation of public workshops for the first portion of the process. A series of public workshops was initiated in the late fall of 2003 and continued through much of 2004, inclusive of a special bicycle/pedestrian workshop in May of 2004. Public workshops were suspended in late 2004 until the City could refine the transportation model in order to provide useful information for the City's planning needs.

The Opportunity Corridor planning process was the focus of a series of special public workshops in 2004 and 2005 concluding with a public hearing by the Planning Board in June of 2005. In the Summer and Fall of 2005, each of the Master Plan committees held its own workshops on the respective sections of the Plan on which the committee's efforts were focused. In the Fall of 2005, the Planning Board held a public workshop on alternative future growth scenarios which then led to a series of Planning Board work sessions where choices were made for policies and recommendations that were to be included in the draft Master Plan.

In 2006, the Master Plan committees finalized their efforts and submitted final reports on the respective sections of the draft Master Plan and in the Fall of 2006, the Planning Board held a public hearing on its final recommendations on land use. The Planning Board then spent much of 2007 refining the draft Master Plan that was published in the Fall of 2007. Public hearings were held on the draft in January 2008 prior to final adoption of this Master Plan.

F. THE VISION FOR CONCORD

This vision for Concord builds on the past work in thinking about the future of the City. This vision refines the goals from the 1993 Master Plan and incorporates many of the ideas that emerged from the 20/20 Vision and the Community Survey. The Vision lays out what is important to the community as the City grows and changes over the next twenty years. The Vision also establishes an image of what Concord will be in the future.

THE VISION FOR CONCORD

- ***Concord maintains its essential character that is valued by its residents while accommodating growth and development in a way that maintains and is consistent with that essential character.*** The essential character of Concord includes:

- a vibrant, economically viable downtown that is the social and cultural center of the community
 - established neighborhoods and villages that provide a diversity of housing that meets the need of a variety of households
 - opportunities for economic growth
 - an extensive rural landscape including preserved open space, active agricultural lands, and working forests.
- ***New development maintains and reinforces the historical pattern of land use and development in Concord.*** Growth, development, and change occur in ways that reinforce the essential character of the City and do not undermine what residents value about the City. Most new development occurs within the built-up area of Concord and is of an “urban” character and density. Infill development that is sympathetic to established patterns occurs in existing neighborhoods and in the downtown areas. New “village-style” development occurs on the fringe of the existing built-up area. Older, underutilized areas near downtown are redeveloped into vibrant employment centers and mixed-use neighborhoods. The sprawl of development into the rural parts of the community is minimized and the rural landscape maintained. Much of the development that could have occurred in these rural areas is transferred to the urban core so that rural land owners are not financially disadvantaged. The development that does occur in the rural areas is “rural” not “suburban” in character, and does not adversely affect a working rural landscape. Rural development is clustered with much of the site preserved as open space. Areas with significant natural resource value are protected and substantial areas of open space are permanently preserved. Concord’s historic pattern of development is reinforced.
 - ***Concord continues to provide a diversity of housing to meet to needs of a wide range of households.*** Housing exists to meet the needs of a wide range of people – young families with children, the elderly, empty-nesters, young professionals, business owners and managers – in a range of urban and village settings. Households with a range of incomes are able to live in Concord. People who work in Concord – professionals, business owners, police officers, state employees – are able to live in Concord. Housing that is affordable for low and moderate income families is available both in the City itself and throughout the larger region. Older residential neighborhoods are maintained and their desirability and livability enhanced. New housing is located primarily within the existing built-up area of the City including the downtowns and the Opportunity Corridor, and offers a range of types of units and a range of prices. New housing is designed to reduce the impacts of the development on the community – they are energy efficient, are located where people can walk or bike for some of their travel needs, they consume less water and generate less wastes, and are environmental friendly.
 - ***The City’s historic buildings and districts are preserved and used as essential components of the community.*** Historic buildings are maintained and utilized. The City and the State cooperate on the management of historic properties owned by the state and they are preserved and utilized if feasible. Demolition of historic buildings occurs only when there is no realistic option for preserving them. The character of historic districts is maintained. New development in or adjacent to historic districts respects the character of the area and does not compromise the historic environment. Landscapes and vistas with historic relevance are protected from encroachment by development – the view of the Capitol dome is preserved.

- ***Concord has a vibrant, growing economy that provides both jobs and goods and services to residents of the City and the larger region.*** Concord continues to be the regional job and service center. The share of the property taxes paid by non-residential properties increases through economic growth and development including redevelopment of older, underutilized areas. Downtown Concord, and Downtown Penacook to a lesser extent, experience continued growth as retail, service, and entertainment centers. The Opportunity Corridor is the focus of Downtown-style redevelopment with a mix of uses including office, retail, service, institutional, high density residential, and lodging that expands the number of good quality jobs in the community, increases the tax base, and creates new housing. The Southern Opportunity Corridor develops as an urban village consisting of high density residential development with a supporting mix of small scale retail and service uses as well as a campus for educational use. New non-residential development is well designed, minimizes its impacts on the community, its neighbors, and the environment, and enhances the quality of life in Concord. Most new buildings are “green” and meet requirements for minimizing the impact on the environment.
- ***Residents are able to easily and safely move throughout the City by a variety of means while protecting the livability of neighborhoods.*** The City’s street system functions appropriately – arterial streets and collectors carry commuter and destination traffic safely and efficiently, the movement of goods occurs on appropriate truck routes, streets in residential neighborhoods serve local traffic and are not used as short cuts; streets and sidewalks are designed to enhance walkability. Major improvements are made to the road system but only when or in ways that are consistent with the City’s other objectives. New streets are designed to be interconnected and reinforce the “street network”. Dead ends or cul-de-sacs are discouraged. The opportunities for moving around the City without having to use a car increase – opportunities for using public transportation expand, while neighborhoods, open spaces, and downtown are interconnected with sidewalks, trails, and bicycle lanes. The entire transportation system within the City becomes more attractive – more attractive to users and more attractive visually. Aesthetics are integrated into transportation improvements – the quality of the City’s “streetscape” is enhanced.
- ***Areas within the City are protected and maintained as rural landscapes, active agricultural lands, and working forests.*** The rural areas of the City remain rural. Activities involving resource production or utilization remain and are economically viable. Residential and other uses that could adversely affect these traditional uses are managed to reduce their impact. Development that could have occurred in these areas is “transferred” to growth areas and the rural landowners are compensated for giving up their development potential. Substantial areas are acquired and set aside as permanent open space for the benefit of the entire community. Areas with significant natural or cultural resource value such as important wetlands, riparian corridors, floodplains, bluffs, and historic or archeological sites are protected from development, use, or alteration that would diminish their resource value. Protected open spaces and natural resource areas form interconnected networks allowing for environmental and habitat benefit as well as for trail linkages.
- ***Concord residents have access to a wide range of public recreational facilities and opportunities.*** The City’s neighborhoods all have recreational facilities that enhance their desirability as residential areas. The City continues to provide parks, recreational facilities, and programming that perpetuate the community’s long standing traditions of recreational activities and sports on a year-round basis. Access to the City’s waterbodies including the

Merrimack River is expanded. The City's recreational and open space areas are well managed and maintained, and used cooperatively with the City's school districts, as well as local recreation leagues and organizations. A comprehensive system of recreational trails for walking, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling is maintained in cooperation with private organizations.

- ***The City's residents and businesses continue to be adequately served by municipal facilities and services, as well as public utilities.*** Concord continues its tradition of providing excellent fire, police, public works, library, and administrative services to residents and taxpayers. The facilities that house and support these services are expanded, upgraded, and replaced as necessary to keep pace with the City's growing population and employment. Municipal utility systems are maintained, and expanded within the Urban Growth Boundary to ensure continuous delivery of an adequate supply of potable water together with sufficient capacity to suppress fires, and the collection and appropriate treatment of sanitary sewage. Other public utilities expand appropriately to provide adequate and uninterrupted delivery of electricity, natural gas, and telecommunications.
- ***Concord's natural resources are appropriately protected, and natural hazards are identified and addressed.*** The City continues to value its extensive natural resources including wildlife habitat, prime agricultural soils, and productive forest lands as well as water resources and related floodplains, aquifers, and wetlands. These natural resources will continue to provide potable water for both the public and individual water supplies, and to foster agricultural and silvicultural production. The City will continue to protect floodplains and wetlands to ensure that natural absorptive capacities will continue to be available, and will employ low impact design for drainage facilities to mitigate hazards from flooding and stormwater runoff.

G. SUMMARY

This Vision for Concord sets out what Concord will become looking ahead ten, twenty, even fifty years into the future, and provides direction as to how the City should grow and change, and how and where development should, and should not, occur. The Vision establishes the community's goals – what are the things that are really valued and desired to be part of this community in the future. It is the destination.

The following sections of the Master Plan address these topics in more detail and begin to look at what the City and the larger community will need to do to make sure that the Vision becomes reality. Finally, in the Implementation Section, a detailed action plan is set forth outlining what specific actions need to be taken by whom and in what time frame – this is the charting of the course part of the Master Plan.

H. SUPPORTING STUDIES

A 20/20 Vision for Concord, NH – Concord: City of Villages, The initiative for a 20/20 Vision for Concord, September 2001.

City of Concord Master Plan Year 2010 Update, Concord Planning Board & Concord Planning Department, Concord, NH, December 15, 1993.

Concord Master Plan Community Survey, prepared by The NorthMark Group, 2004.